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Message Text

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17
ACTION AF-06

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-02

INR-07 L-02 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 IO-10 OMB-01 (ISO) W
---------- 103533
R 191705Z MAY 75
FM AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5854
INFO AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMCONSUL DOUALA BY POUCH

C O N F I D E N T I A L YAOUNDE 1698

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINS, CM
SUBJECT: RELEASE OF BISHOP ALBERT NDONGMO AND OTHERS IMPRISONED
FOR 1970 ANTI-AHIDJO PLOT

REF: YAOUNDE'S A-21, MARCH 7

1. CAMEROONIAN MEDIA ANNOUNCED MAY 17 THAT PRESIDENT AHIDJO HAD PARDONED BISHOP ALBERT NDONGMO AND OTHERS CONVICTED WITH HIM IN JANUARY 1971 FOR ALLEGED ANTI-REGIME PLOTTING IN MAJOR TRIALS THAT PROVED TO BE FINAL CHAPTER IN WHAT MIGHT BE CALLED VIOLENT PHASE OF NOW-MORIBUND UPC REBELLION AGAINST AHIDJO GOVERNMENT. WILL BE RECALLED UPC REBEL MILITARY LEADER ERNEST OUANDIE AND SEVERAL COHORTS WERE EXECUTED AFTER CONVICTION IN TWO RELATED TRIALS BUT BISHOP NDONGMO, WHO ALSO SENTENCED TO DEATH, RECEIVED PRESIDENTIAL COMMUTATION TO LIFE IMPRISONMENT RESUMABLY OWING HIS RELIGIOUS PRESTIGE.

2. PUBLIC REPORTS ON BISHOP'S RELEASE SO FAR GIVE FEW DETAILS ON BACKGROUND OR REASONS FOR DECISION. HOWEVER, CAMEROON NEWS AGENCY (ACAP) ITEM LINKS PARDON TO START
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OF NEW PRESIDENTIAL MANDATE IN TERMS THAT, COMBINED WITH

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TIMING JUST PRIOR NATIONAL DAY, LEAVE NO DOUBT IT STRONGLY CONDITIONED BY AHIDJO STRENGTHENED POLITICAL POSITION IN WAKE SUCCESSFUL PARTY CONGRESS AND TROUBLE-FREE ELECTION APRIL 5 TO ANOTHER 5-YEAR TERM. ACAP QUOTES ARCHBISHOP JEAN ZOA OF YAOUNDE AS HAVING EXPRESSED "CHURCH'S GRATITUDE AND APPRECIATION TO PRESIDENT AHIDJO AND URGED CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY TO PRAY FOR HIM...IN HIS ONEROUS TASK."

3. UNCERTAINTY REIGNS AS TO FULL EXTENT PARDONS AND RELEASE FROM PRISON OF ALLEGED CO-CONSPIRATORS IN 1970 PLOT. CAMEROON TRIBUNE OF MAY 19 ANNOUNCED THAT 50 PRISONERS WERE LIBERATED IN ADDITION BISHOP, BUT ANOTHER EMBASSY SOURCE SUGGESTS NUMBER MAY BE MORE THAN 100, INCLUDING ABOUT DOZEN ACTUALLY CONVICTED AND NUMEROUS OTHERS DETAINED "ADMINISTRATIVELY" SINCE 1971 FOR ALLEGED INVOLVEMENT IN PLOT. DEPARTMENT'S ATTENTION CALLED TO ACY-1083, 19 MAY 1975 FOR ADDITIONAL PERTINENT DETAILS.

4. COMMENT: REFERENCE TO OUR FILES ON NDONGMO AND OUANDIE TRIALS SHOWS 72 PRISON SENTENCES HANDED DOWN IN ALL. EMBASSY INFERS FROM UNOFFICIAL COMMENTS OF ONE KNOWLEDGEABLE GURC FUNCTIONARY THAT WHATEVER PRECISE NUMBER RELEASED, CAMEROONIAN PRISONS NOW CLEAR OF ALL OR VIRTUALLY ALL PERSONS PREVIOUSLY HELD IN CONNECTION WITH OUANDIE/NDONGMO CONSPIRACY. VIEWED AGAINST EMBASSY'S PRIOR AVAILABLE INFORMATION ON "POLITICAL PRISONERS" PER REFAIR, IT WOULD APPEAR PRESIDENT AHIDJO'S ACTION HAS ALSO DRASTICALLY REDUCED TOTAL NUMBER SUCH DETAINEES IN CAMEROON AND SHOULD HAVE ALL BUT ELIMINATED HIS GOVERN-MENT'S FURTHER VULNERABILITY TO SERIOUS CHARGES OF INTERNING CITIZENS FOR POLITICAL PURPOSES. EXAGGERATED CHARGES TO THIS EFFECT MADE DURING PAST YEAR BY AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL AND OTHER HUMAN RIGHTS SPOKESMEN, AS WELL AS BY EXILE OPPONENTS OF AHIDJO REGIME, ALMOST UNDOUBTEDLY PLAYED PART IN GURC'S DECISION TO RELEASE BISHOP AND OTHER PRISONERS AT THIS PARTICULAR TIME. EMBASSY OFFICERS WERE IMPRESSED BY VISIBLE AND EXPLICIT SATISFACTION RE-FLECTED BY SEVERAL HIGH-LEVEL GURC OFFICIALS, INCLUDING FOREIGN MINISTER EFON, WHEN ALLUSION MADE TO JUST-ANNOUNCED RELEASES DURING MAY 17 DINNER AT RESIDENCE DURING VISIT
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ASSISTANT SECRETARY DAVIS.
MOORE

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To: STATE
Type: TE
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